

Virginia for his courtesy and his kindness.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. LANDRIEU). The Senator from West Virginia.

CHRISTMAS SPIRIT

Mr. BYRD. Madam President, soon the Senate will recess for Christmas. Members will travel home to their families and to their States to share in Christmas parades and tree lightings, Christmas cantatas, and festivals of lights. They will decorate their own trees and attend the Christmas season celebrations in their own churches. Some will make trips to Iraq or Afghanistan, while others will comfort people who are struggling to recover from wildfires or the recent devastating snow and ice storms that have left so many homeless and without power. I join in the prayers for their swift recoveries, and I rejoice in the fellowship and the support that are flowing to Americans in need all across the Nation and all around the world. That fellowship and that support is the true spirit of the Christmas season.

Everywhere, everywhere, Christmas tonight!
Christmas in lands of the fir-tree and pine,
Christmas in lands of the palm-tree and vine,
Christmas where snow peaks solemn and white,

Christmas where cornfields stand sunny and bright.

Christmas where children are hopeful and gay,

Christmas where old men [like I] are patient and gray,

Christmas, where peace, like a dove in its flight,

Broods o'er brave men in the thick of the fight;

Everywhere, everywhere, Christmas tonight!
For the Christ-child who comes is the Master of all;

No palace too great, no cottage too small.

Christmas is a special time, no matter where the season finds us. Somehow, Christmas lights create their special magic, whether they are hung on snow-laden pine trees or wrapped around stately palm trees. Christmas carols never fail to bring a nostalgic glow, as they bring to mind our childhood celebrations. The smells and fragrances of Christmas recall their own delightful memories—the tang of pine boughs brought indoors, the spicy warmth of cinnamon, cardamom, cloves and mace, the licorice scent of anise, the exotic aroma of nutmeg. Christmas baking is one of the best parts of the holiday—Erma always looked forward to that part. Christmas baking is one of the best parts of the holiday, she would say—as the house fills with mouth-watering aromas. My own childhood Christmases were spare, not lavish, but they were full of love, given to me by a wonderful old couple who have gone on now to meet their reward in heaven.

Today's Christmases should be full of special food and lots of music, and if it were like it used to be, it would be played by me, that music would be, on

my fiddle, to entertain my mom and dad, their friends and their borders. My mom ran a boarding house. We never had very much at Christmas, not much compared to some of the extravagant gifts advertised these days, but our simple celebrations left us more time to enjoy some company or the church services or read a Christmas story together.

Every family, every town builds its own Christmas traditions. Some families visit or host Christmas open houses. Other families gather for a traditional Christmas meal. In some towns, people bundle up to watch floats go by in the annual Christmas parade, followed by a tree lighting ceremony. We have done that in the Nation's capital. I myself have lit the tree. There are Christmas tree lighting ceremonies at the White House and on Capitol Hill. At Arlington Cemetery and at other veterans cemeteries around the Nation, the simple act of a single man has grown into a Wreaths Across America, an effort to put fresh wreaths on the graves of veterans across the Nation, honoring those who will never be home again for Christmas. Other volunteer efforts send living Christmas trees to the troops overseas so they, too—our troops, your troops, my troops; our soldiers, sailors, and our airmen—can share in the Christmas season. In the busy press of family traditions, it is heartwarming to discover how many people still find time to remember and celebrate the sacrifices made by others.

Although Christmas can bring with it even busier schedules for already busy people and monetary stresses for parents trying to make the day a special holiday for their children, it is important to recall the greatest gift of Christmas is the one embodied in the nativity scene—the great gift of unconditional love and hope wrapped in swaddling clothes, given by our Creator—our Creator Almighty God—to inspire us with His teachings of good will and caring toward all men.

And so, my colleagues, my friends, dear ones all of you; staff, those who watch over us every day, it is my Christmas wish that we all keep more of that Christmas spirit with us throughout the coming year. Charles Dickens said it best:

I will hold Christmas in heart, and try to keep it all the year.

I guess it was the American editor and author, Oren Arnold, who lived from 1900 until 1980, who suggested a wonderful Christmas gift list for all of us:

To your enemy, forgiveness; to an opponent, tolerance; to a friend, your heart; to a customer, service; to all, charity; to every child, a good example; to yourself, respect.

Madam President, I wish you and Louisiana, near the great bay and the waters which wash over the soil on which I used to walk with my wife—I wish you, Madam President, and everyone listening, a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year filled with peace and happiness. My God bless you all.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New York.

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, first I extend my holiday greetings, my Christmas greetings, to my colleague and friend, Senator BYRD, as well as to you, Madam President, and my colleagues from New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and everyone else in this Chamber. May God give a wonderful year to them and their families.

Madam President, I thank you for your help with this next particular issue.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New York is recognized.

NICS IMPROVEMENT AMENDMENTS ACT OF 2007

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent the Judiciary Committee be discharged from further consideration of H.R. 2640 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 2640) to improve the National Instant Criminal Background Check System, and for other purposes.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, today, the Senate took an important step forward to improve the National Instant Criminal Background Check System, NICS, the Nation's background check system for gun purchases. Along with Senator SCHUMER, I have worked hard to craft this compromise legislation that respects the rights of gun owners and, at the same time, makes sure that the NICS system will work more effectively. This compromise has not been easy, as many have strong views on issues surrounding this bill, but working with Senators on both sides of the aisle, we have forged strong, fair legislation to address serious shortcomings in the Federal program. Throughout the process, we have taken great care to make sure Federal law governing who can own or possess a firearm remains unchanged. The Senate language makes clear that the correct records will go into the NICS system, that any records improperly in NICS will be removed promptly, that legal notice and due process considerations will be required in Federal proceedings, and that the States have sufficient support to meet the goals of the bill. We have been responsive to the legitimate concerns of veterans and advocates on both sides of the issue, and at the same time, we have worked hard to correct weaknesses that have been exposed by the tragic events of the last year.

The senseless loss of life at Virginia Tech this spring revealed serious flaws in the NICS system, particularly in the transfer of mental health information